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## CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

### A LETTER FROM DR. PAUL TOPINARD.

The last numbers of *The Monist* and *Open Court* gave me such satisfaction that I cannot resist the temptation to express it to you. Please accept my congratulations on the evolution which I perceive in these magazines since their foundation. They answer perfectly the purpose of the founders to help in furthering the evolution of thought throughout the world, in the search for truth and its best application to the welfare of humanity.

Some years ago you invited me to publish my attitude toward the religious problem. I did not answer then because I thought I was not ready for it, I believed that the difference between us was too great. I was puzzled with your use of the word "form" in distinction from the meaning of it to which I was accustomed, that is, as a synonym for the physical shape of a body. But in the meantime I have read all your editorial articles, particularly your answer to Mr. Schumaker which made a different impression on me than your answer some years ago to Mr. Hyacinthe Loyson; and now I understand you perfectly I believe.

No doubt we have the same aim, but we differ in two points: first, your purpose is philosophy, mine is application. Secondly, you proceed in your reasoning by idealistic conceptions and I by materialistic observation and induction.

Your normative factors of existence are the "ideas" of Plato. Your God is their prototype, the central, the highest, whether in the universe or in oneself. The soul is a portion of Him, transitory in our brain but imperishable. Physicists would say it is energy. You add that those normative factors are realities, but that the man untrained in abstract thought cannot comprehend them. Well, I must say I am among those untrained and I have great difficulty in comprehending as realities in my brain those things which are not physical. Notwithstanding, your pantheistic conception of nomotheism

and entheism pleases me ; that is, of a God everywhere, even in ourselves. But it is only a philosophical view and does not meet the demands of experience. Such a God can not be supplicated and invoked, nor your "immortal" soul which is but a portion of the universal spirit.

In fact after long meditation and in spite of the fact that I belong to a group systematically anti-religious, anthropology understood in its wide acceptation has led me to the conclusion that a faith is necessary for utilitarian purposes. The very great majority has need of it, viz., children until, let us say the age of ten years, a premature skepticism tending to make anarchists of them ; women, in whom sentiment is a requisite of their special function of reproduction ; the downtrodden, such as slaves ; and those broken-hearted by great natural misfortunes. I do not include the unsuccessful in the struggle for life, for every one must reap what he has sown, must receive the full effects of his acts. It is the penalty of responsibility.

But on what foundations can we base that faith ? The best certainly would be the ordinary conception of God as the Creator and governor of the universe, whom we can supplicate and invoke, and the conception of our ego surviving to receive just retribution for our thoughts and deeds on earth. Philosophers have built systems to support these conceptions, among which the most rational are nomotheism and entheism. Churches have done the same, either at some definite time or gradually : at some definite time through a prophet or God-man who said or believed that his was the divine mission to proclaim the revelation or *Logos* of God ; or through a simple man who preaches from his heart and who is the product of his surroundings, his personal education and hereditary predisposition, to whose ministrations the churches then add the rites and ceremonies so necessary to the common people. But science has never given its sanction to these conceptions. Neither can energy be said to be the God we dream of and need ; the ego or soul begins with the first sensation of the child and ends with the last breath of the individual, young or old.

Now these two conceptions are really indispensable. China, putting aside Lao-tze and Buddha, has not a supernatural faith. The religion of Confucius is only an ethical system built up on that which flourished in the time of the emperors Yu Ki, Yao and Shun. The national religion in China is filial piety, the worship of ancestors and benefactors of the race, the earliest progenitor in prehistoric

times being the son of the heavens. Some may think that such a religion is the cause of China's deadlock in civilization although so advanced some 4500 years ago. But in my opinion it is the Chinese language and system of writing which retarded China's progress, the introduction of Buddhism serving to confirm the results.

Shall I speak of other conceptions or abstractions which have been or might have been held up as a sort of idol, that is to say anthropomorphized and surrounded with rites and ceremonies so that the people would form the habit of considering them as a guardian or fetish to which they may appeal and which they can adore? First among such ideas stands Plato's conception of the Supreme Good, that is the perfection uniting the true, the good and the beautiful. Next the conception of virtue or of wisdom so much talked of, especially by the Stoics. Reason worshiped by the first French republic is in the same category. Such also would be the Utopian conception of universal altruism or fraternity, of solidarity, of equality of all classes and all men (a senseless idea since there is no equality in nature), of collectivism, etc.

The best concept, I must say, to take a synonym of God would be justice so much sought after by the Jews and finding its consummation in the eschatology of the Persians. But its non-existence around us is too evident. My definition of it is this: Justice is in our mind the consecration of human responsibility; it is receiving what is due to oneself and to others, the full effects of conduct.

All those conceptions are more or less included in God-nature or God-cosmic-order. They are attributes or secondary aspects of Him, your superreal factors of life. They all answer to the same disposition or need of a faith for man. This view of yours is quite ingenious and I accept it. Then we are not atheists, we understand God in a wider sense, higher than in the ordinary orthodox manner, that is all.

Another idea, conscience, approximates your soul or entheism in the same way. It corresponds to that of the Christ-ideal of which you speak, that will remain after the historical Christ as the best guide for virtuous conduct.

I will not stop here to discuss your consciousness in your interesting article in *The Monist* of January, 1908. ("Mysticism" also is interesting). Conscience, in common opinion, is the inner voice which more or less imperatively tells us what we must do or not do. In my opinion conscience is the physiological product, accumulated and

confirmed by heredity, of those demands of social life, which a long experience of man has recognized in the course of centuries and ages. They are the hereditary habits of Spencer, myself and others, which in animals are called instincts. Their origin does not trouble your consciousness of the ego and entheism. Although conscience can not be worshiped or invoked it can be heeded. Is it not after all the virtue or wisdom taught by a long experience?

Now leaving the speculative considerations, what is to be done at the present time? Must we proceed by a revolution or be opportunists and continue the evolution whose course hitherto has been as follows:

(1) Naturalism leading to polytheism; (2) Local and national gods, each proclaimed as the only and the best; (3) Monotheism, one of these gods such as Yahveh taking the head. The evolution of the religious need made a great advance at the beginning of the Roman empire, and another at the time of Luther. At the present time another and greater advance is in progress. Oriental archeology, the two last volumes of Loisy on the Synopsis, and such articles as those of *The Monist* and *The Open Court* show that the day is near. A few years ago in Switzerland I had a private talk with an illustrious Protestant professor of theology, and put the following question to him:

There are two systems in Christian Churches, one of them has its foundation exclusively on the Bible whose influence is melting away; the other is founded on decrees (decretals, true or false). whose supporters would die rather than make the least concession to modern thought. Is it not the duty of the most liberal in the first to take the lead and start the movement forward?

In *The Open Court* of November, 1907, you wrote in excellent terms that it would not be wise to make too rapid an advance and that the churches must be given time. You suggest that it would be better to cling to the most liberal of Christ ideals, and you accept the proposition of Mr. Bell to have instead of the Bible a book of compilations gathered from all sources, containing suitable teachings and sentences from Jesus, Paul, Confucius, Zarathushtra, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, etc. I would add even prophets of primitive people and modern authors. A few days ago I was reading the six first chapters of the *Didache* or Teaching of the Apostles, which contains very good suggestions for daily conduct. The habit would be slowly formed of seeking ethical standards in this collection instead of in the Gospels which are not always clear to the reader.

Afterwards other modes of procedure would be found which would at last bring about the best universal religion combined with the best universal ethics in accordance with the happiness of mankind.

I spoke above of a revolutionary method which would be less slow. I hardly dare say what I was thinking. Well, it would tend to the practice of filial piety, the cultivation of the family and the worship of benefactors of mankind, as in China but with better position given to women. Before long the institution of the family will be entirely lost in our countries if we do not strengthen it and make it the palladium of society. Surely families are not eternal and do not realize immortality; but by his ancestors a father extends one hand to the past and by his descendants stretches one hand towards the future. An old man on the eve of his death thinks that his good deeds will be an example and capital for his posterity. Beside this consideration does it not also favor the physiological end of the genus *homo*?

But would it not be possible to combine the systems: (1) Christ as a center, as we would take Tell or Osiris, because his name is widely popular, and as a synonym of duty or wisdom, the product of man's experience in the course of ages; (2) the religion of filial piety and the worship of benefactors in ethics. It is the business of the laity to study the question.

Now both Mr. Bell and yourself are under an illusion. You believe that it will be possible at some remote time to build up a practical religion or church on the foundation of eternal truths; but truths are the property of scientists and philosophers, and not fully accessible to the great majority for whom the churches are intended. One of my conclusions in anthropology is that the always persistent animal nature of man is in contradiction with the requirements of social life. It is only through laws supported by a police that our ego recognizes that concessions must be made to others, in order to have the benefit of reciprocal concessions.

After all, what are those eternal truths? Are they natural laws, determined and formulated by physics, biology or sociology, and answering to true realities; or conceptions of the human mind, the normative types of thought which you call superrealities, or meta-realities as a theorem of geometry?

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